

Press Release

November 19, 2018

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### **SAFE Glen Cove Coalition: Taxing Big Pharma**

An article in the September newsletter of Nassau County Department of Human Services discusses States intent on taxing Big Pharma over the Opioid Crisis. Lawmakers want to raise taxes on pharmaceutical companies to help pay for the cost of the opioid crisis. Success has been elusive but that won't stop them from trying again next year. Minnesota State Rep. Dave Baker, a Republican who sponsored a failed "penny a pill" bill during this year's session, has said that he plans on a different focus in 2019: pharmaceutical licensing reform. Liquor stores and bars pay thousands of dollars each year for the privilege of selling alcohol, Baker noted this week at a conference on opioids in Minneapolis, but drug companies only pay a few hundred dollars in licensing fees.

Record numbers of people are dying each year from drug overdoses. Last year, more than 70,000 people died of an overdose -- a 13 percent increase over 2016. Baker's bill would have raised an estimated \$20 million in new annual funding for abuse prevention and treatment efforts by charging pharmaceutical companies a fee for every opioid painkiller they sell. But after heavy lobbying by Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America (PhRMA), the fee was dropped from the House version of the bill and, as a result, stalled in the Senate. Like many lawmakers leading the charge against big pharma, Baker and co-sponsor Chris Eaton, who was also at the conference, have each lost a child to an opioid overdose.

Minnesota's effort comes as other states have struggled to hold big pharma financially accountable in response to the opioid crisis. California, Delaware, Iowa, Kentucky, Maine, Massachusetts, Montana, New Jersey, Tennessee and Vermont all tried and failed to pass opioid taxes this year. Lawmakers in those states say they will try again in 2019. Dozens of cities, counties and states are also suing opioid makers and distributors, arguing that the companies downplayed the dangers of addictive pills and ignored signs they were being abused on a massive scale.

If pharmaceutical companies were held financially accountable, it could produce billions of dollars in government revenue to fight addiction and overdose, but the lawsuits are expected to take years to resolve. So far, only New York state has been somewhat successful in financially targeting the industry. It passed a bill in the spring that raises \$100 million a year for addiction treatment, prevention and education via a tax on manufacturers and distributors. The bill also prohibits passing the tax on to consumers and other purchasers such as insurance companies, a key criticism of Minnesota's penny-a-pill method. But the New York legislation is on hold thanks to a lawsuit filed this summer by the pharmaceutical industry.

For more information about this Newsletter and Nassau County Health and Human Services please visit <https://www.nassaucountyny.gov/3590/Human-Services>.

The SAFE Glen Cove Coalition is conducting an opioid prevention awareness campaign entitled, "Keeping Glen Cove SAFE," in order to educate and update the community regarding opioid use and its consequences. To learn more about the SAFE Glen Cove Coalition please follow us on [www.facebook.com/safeglencovecoalition](https://www.facebook.com/safeglencovecoalition) or visit SAFE's website to learn more about the Opioid Epidemic at [www.safeglencove.org](http://www.safeglencove.org).